



# HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (UNHRC)

ADDRESSING THE ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS  
ABUSES IN CHINESE VOCATIONAL AND TRAINING  
CENTRES IN XINJIANG

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## Introduction

Throughout recent years, the People's Republic of China has shown to have ambivalent tendencies when it comes to the government's minority policies regarding the treatment of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in China's autonomous region of Xinjiang.

Since May 2018, the western news media reported that hundreds of thousands of Muslims, particularly of Uighur origin and Turkic ethnicity, have been arbitrarily detained in massive internment camps in western Xinjiang. It is said that the operation of these internment camps take place outside of the legal system meaning that the actions of the Xinjiang government does not rest upon any legal bases which would allow the imprisonment of individual Uighur Muslims. The News Media suggests that torture, mistreatment and arbitrary mass detention is conducted by Chinese officials against Muslim minorities, particularly Uighurs on grounds of religious practices and ethnicity. The Chinese government denies these allegations and has repeatedly stated that "minor offenders of religious extremism or separatism were taken to 'vocational education' and employment training centres with a view to assisting in their rehabilitation" in line with the governments "Strike hard Campaign on Violent Terrorism".

## Definition of Key Terms

### Persecution

Persecution refers to the systematic maltreatment of an individual or a group by another individual or group. These maltreatments are often based on religion, race and political opinion.



## Internment

Internment is the imprisonment of a large group of people without the intent to file charges, resulting into no trial. This term is particularly used to refer to the preventive confinement of enemy citizens in wartime or of terrorism suspects.

## Detainees

Detainees are persons who have been officially ordered to stay in a prison or similar place, especially for political reasons.

## Vocational and educational training centres

In general, vocational and educational training centres refer to institutions that are specifically designed to prepare people to work in specific jobs such as a craft or technician.

In the context of the situation in Xinjiang, Chinese officials state that “minor offenders of religious extremism or separatism are taken to 'vocational education' and employment training centres with a view to assisting in their rehabilitation”. According to Chinese officials “the education and training measures taken by the local government of Xinjiang have not only effectively prevented the infiltration of religious extremism and helped those lost in extremist ideas to find their way back, but also provided them with employment training in order to build a better life.”

In contrast to this, report of the Human Rights Watch and witnesses who escaped the detention centres stated that the camps are used for the systematic incarceration of Muslim minorities, particularly Uighur Muslims, on grounds of religious practices and ethnicity. Former inmates report about torture and maltreatment as well as forced indoctrination conducted by the Chinese officials on the detainees.

## Discrimination

Discrimination describes the treatment and distinction towards a person based on the group, class or category they are perceived as to belong to. These may include ethnicity, age, gender, nationality etc.



## Human Rights

Human Rights refer to morally justified freedom and autonomy claims which are believed to be kept accessible for every human being. They are justified by references to human nature, should be the same for all and should be valid for all human beings everywhere, so they are considered universal, inalienable and indivisible.

## General Overview

Since the Ürümqi riots in July 2009, the Chinese government of Xinjiang imposed repressive policies on local Muslim minorities by, for instance, replacing the Uighur language with Standard Mandarin in primary schools and penalizing among government workers the wearing of beards and headscarves, fasting and praying while being on job. In following years, the restrictions on minorities continued and eventually increased during 2012, when authorities started “de-extremification” campaigns including the re-education of imams and extremists.

The restrains on public life reached its peak when Chinese authorities announced a "People's war on terror" and introduced new restrictions including bans such as on wearing veils or "abnormal" long beards alongside with prohibitions on naming of children to exaggerate religious fervor.

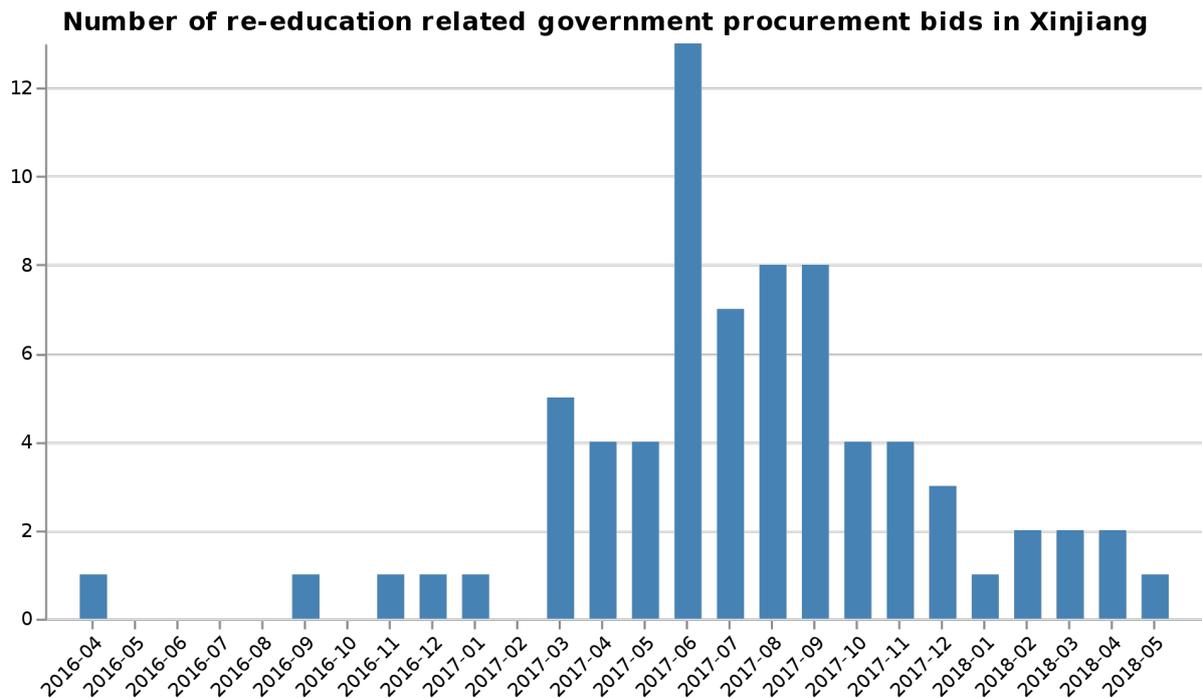
At the same time the local government launched the "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism" in 2014, which lead to many detentions and arrests. In line with the government's ongoing campaign, the province of Xinjiang has been transformed to one of the world's most heavily policed regions under the lead of Chen Quanguo, the current Communist Party Secretary for Xinjiang. Corresponding to the de-extremification campaigns, the concept of re-education has become central to the local governments “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism” and included the construction and formation of “counter-extremism training



centers" and "education and transformation training centers" according to state media and Xinjiang citizen.

With increasing police presence and government ordered surveillance, detainment of locals, particularly of Uighur Muslims, accelerated. According to the media, the region constituted 21% of all arrests in China despite comprising 1.5% of the national population in 2017. Moreover, it is said that the imprisoned people compared to the previous year is seven times more.

In correspondence to that, judicial and other government bureaus of many cities started to release a series of procurement and construction bids for internment camps, which are built throughout the region and are currently used to hold hundreds of thousands of people officially targeted for minor crimes of religious extremism or separatism whilst the extrajudicial incarceration of Muslims, particularly Uighurs, suggests that the government-lead detention takes place on grounds of ethnicity and religious practices.



In the course of 2017 and in early 2018, the Chinese government repeatedly denied the existence of any camps, which were claimed to be used for the extrajudicial imprisonment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. However, after being confronted about them at the United Nations meeting in Geneva in August 2018, officials admitted their existence by stating that “minor offenders of religious extremism or separatism were taken to 'vocational education' and employment training centres with a view to assisting in their rehabilitation”. In October 2018, Chinese officials consequently legalized education camps for the stated goal of eradicating extremism. The respective law allowed the use of detention centres “to carry out the educational transformation of those affected by extremism.” These actions are said to be part of China’s crackdown on terrorism and religious extremism, particularly of the regional authorities’ “Strike-Hard” campaign, and of President Xi’s “stability maintenance” and “enduring peace” drive in the region. According to officials, the campaigns target the eradication of “terrorist elements”. In its practice, however, the campaign exceeds its stated goal in a significant scale and allows authorities to arbitrarily imprison, without any trail or charges levied, anyone suspected of political disloyalty, which in Xinjiang could encompass Uighur people and other Muslim minorities, particularly those who express, even peacefully, their religious or cultural identity.

With rising media coverage and international awareness regarding the situation in eastern China, the mass detention of Muslim minorities in detention camps in the Chinese province of Xinjiang has received increasing international condemnation as evidence about the treatment of detainees and human rights abuses emerged. In September 2018, the Human Rights Watch released a report entitled “‘Eradicating Ideological Viruses’: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims”, which accused China of the systematic mass detention of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Uighurs and other Muslims in political re-education camps without being charged or tried. The article presented new evidence of the Chinese government's mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment, and the increasingly pervasive controls on daily life. The report further urged foreign governments to take action



in form of sanctions against China and those particularly responsible for the situation Xinjiang, primarily Communist Party Secretary for Xinjiang Chen Quanguo.

In August 2018, Senator Marco Rubio and 16 other members of Congress addressed the situation in Xinjiang and urged the United States to impose sanctions against Chinese officials who are responsible for the human rights violations. In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, they called for sanctions on the current Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang autonomous region Chen Quanguo and six other Chinese officials and two businesses which are allegedly associated with the present situation Xinjiang. Previously in April 2018, Senator Marco Rubio and the Representative Chris Smith, the chair and co-chair of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China sent a letter to the US-American Ambassador to China Terry Bransted requesting an investigation into the reported arbitrary and extrajudicial detention of Muslims.

With rising awareness about the political situation in Xinjiang, the U.S. Embassy & Consulate in China released a ministerial statement in July 2018, which mentioned the detention of hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and members of other Muslim minority groups in "political re-education camps" and called the Chinese government "to release immediately all those arbitrarily detained". Prior to the action of the U.S. Embassy, Vice President of the United States Mike Pence condemned the mass detention of Muslims in Xinjiang by stating "Sadly, as we speak as well, Beijing is holding hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions, of Uyghur Muslims in so-called 're-education camps', where they're forced to endure around-the-clock political indoctrination and to denounce their religious beliefs and their cultural identity as the goal". Another statement that has condemned the situation in Xinjiang has been the report of the Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC), an independent agency of the U.S. government which monitors human rights and rule of law developments in the People's Republic of China, which stated that the detention of Muslims in Xinjiang is "the largest mass incarceration of an ethnic minority population in the world today".



Witnesses such as Mihrigul Tursun, an Uighur woman detained in China, who escaped one of these camps, described details of beatings and torture such as the application of electroshocks conducted on inmates. Tursun stated that nine women from her cells died during her three-month long imprisonment due to the conditions in the camp. In general witnesses and former inmates reported about the physical and mental torture conducted by the authorities to indoctrinate people and to suppress dissident religious beliefs and separatist movements. Former inmates claim that they were "forced to study communist propaganda for hours and give thanks to the general Secretary of the Communist Party of China Xi Jinping by chanting 'Long live Xi Jinping'.

"In the camps, these detainees, most of whom are Uighur, are subjected to deeply invasive forms of surveillance and psychological stress as they are forced to abandon their native language, religious beliefs and cultural practices," a statement released by 70 scholars from 26 countries said. "Outside of the camps, more than 10 million Turkic Muslim minorities in the region are subjected to a dense network of surveillance systems, checkpoints, and interpersonal monitoring which severely limit all forms of personal freedom."

## Major Parties Involved

### China

Initially, the Chinese government has denied the existence of any re-education camps in Xinjiang.<sup>[189]</sup>

In response to the statement of Gay McDoughall, a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, who said that in the name of combating religious extremism, China had turned Xinjiang into something resembling a massive internment camp, shrouded in secrecy, a sort of no-rights zone, a Chinese state-run tabloid, Global Times, defended the crackdown in Xinjian by stating that China prevented Xinjiang from becoming 'China's Syria' as local authorities' policies saved countless lives and avoided a 'great tragedy' whilst denying the existence of the re-education camps.



As the Chinese delegation was confronted with the allegations in August 2018, at a UN meeting in Geneva, the delegation denied the existence of re-education centres in Xinjiang and instead stated that “some minor offenders of religious extremism or separatism have been taken to 'vocational education' and employment training centres with a view to assisting in their rehabilitation”. The delegation further emphasised that “it is completely untrue that China put one million Uyghurs into re-education camps”.

As a response to international reactions and allegations put forth, primarily by the USA, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang stated that "anti-China forces had made false accusations against China for political purposes and a few foreign media outlets misrepresented the committee's discussions and were smearing China's anti-terror and crime-fighting measures in Xinjiang".

According to other Chinese officials such Liu Xiaoming, the Ambassador of China to the United Kingdom, “the education and training measures taken by the local government of Xinjiang have not only effectively prevented the infiltration of religious extremism and helped those lost in extremist ideas to find their way back, but also provided them with employment training in order to build a better life.”

China overall defends its crackdown on religious extremism and separatism and argues that the re-education camps are vocational and educational training centres intended to provide minor offenders of religious extremism or separatism with rehabilitation paving their way back to public life. The government of the People’s Republic denies any allegations regarding the arbitrary detention of over one million Uighur Muslims and other members of Muslim minority groups and states that “Xinjiang is enjoying overall social stability, sound economic development and harmonious co-existence of different ethnic groups. The series of measures implemented in Xinjiang are meant to improve stability, development, solidarity and people’s livelihood, crack down on ethnic separatist activities and violent and terrorist crimes, safeguard national security, and protect people’s life and property.”



## United States of America

The United States of America has repeatedly condemned the situation in Xinjiang.

Both the U.S. Embassy & Consulate in China and the Vice President of the United States, Mike Pence, consecutively announced their condemnation of the mass detention of hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and members of other Muslim minority groups in "political re-education camps".

In the course of 2018, as more evidence about the political situation in Xinjiang emerged, U.S. senator Marco Rubio and 16 members of Congress urged the United States to sanction Chinese officials responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang under the Global Magnitsky Act. In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, the group led by Senator Marco Rubio and Representative Chris Smith, Republican co-chairs of the bipartisan Congressional Executive Commission on China, called for sanctions particularly on Chen Quanguo, the current Communist Party Secretary of Xinjiang and six other Chinese officials and two businesses that are allegedly associated with the present situation Xinjiang.

## United Nations

### I. United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Gay McDougall, a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, condemned the actions of the Chinese government and local authorities in Xinjiang. In the opening session on the review of China's policies in Geneva, McDougall stated that In the name of combating religious extremism, China had turned Xinjiang into something resembling a massive internment camp, shrouded in secrecy, a sort of no-rights zone".

### II. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Michelle Bachelet, the High Commissioner for Human Rights called on China to ease restrictions on her and her office's team as they attempted to assess the situation in Xinjiang.



Bachelet urged China to allow observers into Xinjiang and moreover expressed concerns about the situation there.

The High Commissioner stated that the UN rights group had shown that Uighurs and other Muslims are being detained in camps across Xinjiang and that she expects discussions with Chinese officials to begin soon'. Thus, in December 2018, Bachelet has requested direct access to "re-education camps" in China's Xinjiang province, where more than one million Muslims have reportedly been imprisoned. The UN Human Rights High Commissioner intends to verify "worrying reports" the organization had received claiming that inmates were tortured and forced to abide Chinese Communist Party propaganda.

In response, China called for U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet to "respect its sovereignty", after she urged China to allow her team access into Xinjiang and expressed concern about the situation there. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang stated that "China urges the U.N. human rights high commissioner and office to scrupulously abide by the mission and principles of the U.N. charter, respect China's sovereignty, fairly and objectively carry out its duties, and not listen to one-sided information. Beijing still says that the camps are vocational training centers, designed to rehabilitate extremist tendencies among primarily the Uighur population.



## Timeline of Events

Time	Event
2009	<p>July 2009 Ürümqi riots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Violent riots in Ürümqi, Xinjiang, China</li> <li>▪ Lead to repressive policies on local Muslim minorities</li> </ul>
2010	<p>April</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Zhang Chunxian replaced former Communist Party secretary of Xinjiang and continued repressive policies of the former Communist Party Chief Wang Lequan</li> </ul>
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chinese authorities announced a “People’s War on Terror” and local government imposed new restrictions</li> <li>▪ Local government launched “Strike Hard campaign against Violent Terrorism” leading to many incarcerations</li> </ul>
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chen Quanguo replaced Zhang Chunxian as the Communist Party secretary of Xinjiang</li> <li>▪ Between 2016 and 2017 over 90,000 police officers were recruited and 7300 check points throughout the region established</li> </ul>
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In 2017, Xinjiang constituted 21% of all arrests in China since the measures implemented accelerated the detention of locals</li> <li>▪ Increasingly, massive detention centres were constructed</li> </ul> <p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human Rights Watch released a report entitled "China: Free Xinjiang 'Political Education' Detainees"</li> </ul>
2018	<p>April</p>



	<p>July</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Senator Marco Rubio and representative Chris Smith called on U.S Ambassador to China Terry Bransted to investigate the allegations</li> <li>▪ A UK Parliamentary roundtable on increased repression and coerced assimilation has been organized including Rahima Mahmut, a witness of the happening in Xinjiang and Dr. Adrian Zenz who presented evidence of a political re-education network designed for mass detention</li> <li>▪ Vice President of the United States of America Mike Pence condemned the mass detention of Muslim minorities</li> <li>▪ U.S. Congressional Executive Committee on China described the mass detention in Xinjiang as the largest mass incarceration of an ethnic minority population in the world today</li> <li>▪ U.S. Embassy &amp; Consulate in China released Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom Statement on China calling China to release immediately all those arbitrarily detained</li> </ul>
	<p>August</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of racial Discrimination condemned the situation in Xinjiang</li> <li>▪ Chinese state-run tabloid, the Global Times, defended China's crackdown in Xinjiang stating authorities' actions prevented a "great tragedy"</li> <li>▪ At a UN meeting in Geneva, Chinese officials denied the existence of re-education centres in Xinjiang and stated that "some minor offenders of religious extremism or separatism have been taken to 'vocational education' and employment training centres with a view to assisting in their rehabilitation"</li> </ul>

- Senator Marco Rubio and 16 other members of Congress called for sanction on Chinese officials responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang

#### September

- Human Rights Watch released report entitled "Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims" accusing China of systematic mass incarceration and propounded evidence of torture, mistreatment and severe controls on public life
- China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang condemned the report of the Human Rights Watch and accused the organization of prejudice misrepresentation
- The United Nation High Commissioner for Human Rights urged China to allow her team access to Xinjiang and expressed her concerns about the situation there
- China called U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet to pay respect to China's sovereignty

#### December

- The High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet asked for direct access into Xinjiang's Vocational and educational training centres



## Treaties and Resolutions

Due to the recency of the topic there has been no treaties or resolutions propounded by any body of the United Nations or by the Parties involved in the respective subject matter.

## Evaluation of the Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Likewise, due to the recency of the topic there has been no previous attempts to resolve the issue. The High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet asked China for direct access to China's Xinjiang vocational and educational training centres in order to verify reports of human rights abuses and reported allegations of torture and forced indoctrination of Chinese propaganda. However, China called for U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet to "respect its sovereignty", after the commissioner called on China to ease restrictions on her and her office's team and to allow her team access into Xinjiang and conduct their investigation.

## Possible Solutions

Considering the current situation in Xinjiang, possible solutions could be comprised of a successful UN lead investigation under the lead of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and a simultaneous political discourse that would pave the way for the respective parties to settle the issue. Being aware of the recency of the topic, an ongoing debate around the allegations has to be taken into consideration and should be subject of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

However, as substantial evidence about human rights abuses arises, countries can impose sanctions in order to react to and essentially criticise the actions of the Chinese government. As suggested, the group led by Senator Marco Rubio and Representative Chris Smith urged the United States to impose sanctions according to the Global Magnitsky Act against Chinese



officials who are responsible for the human rights violations in Xinjiang. In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, they called for targeted sanctions on the current Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang autonomous region, Chen Quanguo, and six other Chinese officials and two businesses which are allegedly associated with the present situation Xinjiang. The implementation of these measures is still open to debate but for the members of the U.S. Government and the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China possible.

## Important Links

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